

**Meeting Our Long-Term Water Needs**  
**Council President Scott Peters, First District**  
**Carmel Valley News**

Most of us don't think of water as a commodity. It's what we use to wash our dishes, brush our teeth, and fill the kids' swimming pool on a hot summer day. But water is a limited and valuable resource, subject to the laws of supply and demand much like oil and electricity. As we've learned here in Southern California, when supplies of these valuable commodities runs short, prices spike and cutbacks are imposed.

A reliable source of water is vital to San Diego's economic sustainability and quality of life. It is our collective responsibility to find alternative water supplies to meet our long-term needs.

San Diego imports close to 90% of the water we use, making us subject to the whims of the water markets. For decades, we have relied upon water supplied by Northern California and the Colorado River to meet our needs. However, growth in those regions and federal mandates to reduce our share of Colorado River supplies have forced San Diego to think about how to diversity its water portfolio.

Unfortunately, our options are limited and costly. One option is to continue importing water from outside the region, through farm-to-city water transfers such as the Imperial Valley agreement signed last year. However, those agreements are extremely complex, costly, and continue our reliance on others to meet our own needs.

Another option we can pursue is desalination. While I support pursuing a full menu of water options, desal is expensive and relies on energy supplies that may not always be available.

Given these limitations, many cities like San Diego are considering expanding their use of recycled water. Some people are initially turned off by the so-called "yuck factor," but numerous scientific studies have proven that highly treated recycled water is safe to drink. Many other U.S. cities including Denver, Irvine and San Jose are already supplementing their drinking water supplies with safe, clean recycled water.

For the past two years, a group of citizens from across San Diego met to study and debate the ways San Diego could expand its use of recycled water. The city already uses the "purple pipe" system to deliver limited supplies of reclaimed water for industrial and agricultural use. The City of San Diego Assembly on Water Reuse looked at how the city could expand that program, and possibly add highly treated recycled water to the San Vicente and Otay Lakes reservoirs. The 67 members of the Assembly unanimously agreed that the city should pursue some or all of these options.

Last month, the City Council Natural Resources and Culture Committee unanimously agreed to continue the civic conversation on water recycling. It is important to educate the public about our long-term water needs, and the scientific research behind water

recycling. I am confident that when citizens are armed with these facts, they will agree that increasing our use of recycled water is a safe and smart way to ensure San Diego's long-term economic prosperity and quality of life.

For more information on water reuse in San Diego, you can visit the city's website, <http://www.sandiego.gov/water>.